

["Singin' Praises Dat's My Life, Lawd"]

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SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

Life History

TITLE "Singin' Praises Dats My Life, Lawd".

Date of first writing February 17, 1939

Name of person interviewed Emma Sanders, (Negro)

Street Address #1 E. Henrietta Street

Place Union, S. C.

Occupation Cook

Name of Writer Caldwell Sims, Union, S. C.

Name of Reviser J. J. Murray, Spartanburg, S. C.

Emma is about sixty-five years old and lives in a four-room house with her husband, Mango (or "Luck") Sanders. He is a self-supporting Negro. Their house is unusually comfortable for a darkey's house. The floors are carpeted with faded carpets given Emma by the Jennings and Bolton families. It is put down in pieces and the pieces do not match in color or pattern. Each room has an old laundry heater in it, and the kitchen has an open fireplace with a pot crane. A wood range is also used. Emma says that "Luck" fetched that in. "Luck" trucks and butchers, and he has plenty to eat.

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Two nieces from the country live with "Luck" and Emma and attend the Sims High School. These girls wash, iron, cook, and clean for their room and board. Emma had a light stroke last year C. 10. S. C. Box, 2.

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and now she just does light jobs. She visits and laughs and goes to Zion M. E. Church and to St. Paul's, now known as the "Busted Chapel".

"Lawd, Honey, I wuz born down on Mr. William Tucker's place, I thought ev'body knowed dat. Him and Mr. Epps Tucker wus two cousins. Mr. Epps never had no fine house like Mr. William did. Mr. William built himself a mansion, dat he sho did. Honey, aint you never seed Mr. William's house whar' Miss Ada lived even arter she married Mr. Garrett? God bless her sweet soul, she sho' is one fine white lady dat dis nigger will love to her dyin' day, yes, Lawd, dat I will. I went by Tucker from de very fust day I wuz born till 'Luck' come along and married me. Jesus, how I would like to see my old home. "Ada' on de Seaboard Airline Railroad, wuz named fer Miss Ada Tucker, Mr. William's sister.

"Mr. William never married. He had two places; his upper place and his lower place, but dey jined one another. His house is on de upper place. The lower place he called the 'Holmes Place' because old Dr. Holmes once owned it. The road from Santuo is called the 'Old Otterson Fort Road'.

"All de time I lived on dat place I never done nothin' but played wid my rag dolls. I has allus been fat and jolly. Ma used to chafe me fer laughin' out loud when I seed grown folks. Pa worked for standin' wages year in and year out. But when I got about eight years old Pa moved from the Tucker place to the Tom Jeter place. We knows dat now by the 'Dr. Bates' place. Pa kept on workin' dar fer standin' wages, \$8. a month and our rations. We never suffered for a thing in dem days. White folks wuz rich, and dey kept dey hands fat and slick, jes as much as dey did dey hogs and horses.

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"We lived here for thirty years. My parents died here and me and Mango Sanders married here. When we moved here Ma sent me to school. I never had been to school a day in my life. 'Members dat fust day in school as well as if hit wuz yestidy. Ma fixed me in a red and white striped candy dress. One of my sisters carried me 'long wid her to school. Honey, I wuz the skeer'des little gal you ever seed. When we got in de school de teacher sed 'Good Morning'. I giggled. She hit a stick on a table and said, 'Set down and stop dat grinnin' at me, you is in school now'. She was old lady Phyllis Jeter's grown gal, and she was mean. I wus allus skeered of her, and I never did take in no learnin'. We set down kaise we had done walked three miles. Ma had done give me a lunch and I thought she tole me to eat it as soon as I got to school. So when I set down I started eatin' dat lunch. De teacher seed me tryin' to git my sister to eat and she hollered, 'Emma git up and go out in dat yard'. As I went by her she lashed me wid a hickory, and I run outen dat door hollerin'. I went on down in de woods and set down on a log, and when I got through hollerin', I et my lunch and went home.

"Quick as I seed Ma I let out a great bawl. She come atter me and axed me if my sister been fightin' me. I tole her 'No', but de teacher had, and I was not gwine to school no mo'. Ma went up to de big house and tole old lady Phyllis how her gal had done me. She had me hold up my arm so old lady Phyllis could see de red mark on it. Old lady Phyllis made a great 'miration over it and low'd dat she gwine to give dat gal a round when she got home.

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"I never did much at school but played in the pine woods. But the school whar I went to was in the yard of St. Luke's Church. When I went to school I stayed from nine o'clock until four, but most of the day I spent playing ball or sumtin', kaise I allus made my teacher mad so she would send me out. Jes' de same I has allus been in luck. All de lucks in de Lawd; and all de conducts in us.

"Ole man Alf Wright come to visit my white folks. He lived up in Union. He wuz sum kin to my white folks. When he come down in the country he would stay all summer. He drunk

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a lot o' coffee. My fust job wuz parchin' and grindin' coffee. I never will fergit it, dat fust money I made. Mr. Wright called me 'Little Fat Gal'. He give me a quarter ev'y Saturday while he wuz down there. I parched dat coffee and turned it wid a crank. When it was done parched I let it cool. While it wuz a coolin' I be out a playin'. Den I come in a grind it up. The coffee mill had a drawer. When dat drawer wuz full I emptied the ground coffee in a wood tub with a top to shut it up with. 'Members it as good as if 'twas dis mornin'. Lawd have Mercy, Jesus, it sho' puts me in de mind of shoutin' when I thinks about dem good olden days, Yes Lawd', it sho' do. Mr. Wright wuz a good ole bachelor. He made me dance for him while he fiddled. He fiddled mi' ni' all his spare time, and dat wuz all de time. Fer dat, he give me a little change, not much. It meant a lot to me den.

"As I growed up, Mr. Wright never cum no mo', and he married and had two chilluns in his ole days. I seed his wife once, she wuz a fine looking white lady wid quality about her.

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"Cose growin' up aint nothin' 'cept what all de chilluns does. And I would'n have de time dese here gals has now. Dese here gals does'n know nothin' 'bout a good time. When a boy walks wid em twice, why he's ready to marry. Dat all de sense dey got. Lawdy, I is alluw atter 'em 'bout it, dey don't know no good time. Dey thinks dat dey known what a good time is made fer, but dey sho' don't. Dey don't dance like us did when us wuz young. You never heerd no racket behind us. Dat's all follows dey good time, is a racket. I hates rackets. But I likes good times. Dese gals fools 'round too much and dey gits burnt! Best not to fool 'round too rotten much no time, yes dat it is! Dese boys ruin dese gals by doin' things dat the gals thinks dey won't.

"Lawdy, honey, I went to frolics and stayed and danced 'til six in the mornin'. Boys fetched me home in the saddle and dey set behind. Still I kept ahead of 'em. All de gals I run wid done de same way. Now gals can't keep ahead of boys and dey don't have to ride no mules either. Dats only time a boy got his arm around me, den he kept it in de right place. Mango fetched me home from frolics for three years and he never found out nothin' 'bout

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me. Other boys tried to do the same and dey never made no progress. I aint never found out what Mango's ole mule wuz named. Dat de onliest thing he kept me a guessin' on. You is got to keep dem a guessin', kaise all mens is got a streak of cussedness in 'em.

“Finally, when Mango married me, dey started to callin' him 'Luck'. Dey still calls him dat. His Pa got to callin' him 'Luck' afore he died. I rid all Sanders' (dat what 6 I calls him de moes) old mules 'cep'n dat un in de yard now. I aint never found out what dat mule's name is neither, and I don't believe he knows hisself. Sanders calls him anything come to his mind and dat mule keeps a-gwine on.”

Emma sees a large black woman going by and while she is going into her tobacco sack of Golden Grain she hollers, “'Big Baby' how you comin' along wid dat supper fer de 'Busted Chapel'?” Big Baby shakes her head and looks belligerently at Emma and exclaims, “Who dat talkin' 'bout our church dat way? Our church is St. Paul's Baptist, and dat is all we gwine to let any nigger call it”. The ducks and geese in Emma's yard quack and cackle as “Big Baby” departs. She looked around and said, “All you niggers dat wants a good supper come over around dar tonite.” Emma knocks her old cob pipe clean and refills it with fresh Golden Grain that she uses because other kinds of tobacco give her short wind. She studies while she puts her sack away and lights her pipe. Then she drops in to a low tone and says, “I never bothers with no cigarettes. 'Luck' smokes cheap cigars, kaise he thinks he is always 'lucky'.”

A gander comes out and begins fighting the drake duck. “Look at dat old gander. He is so mean, and I gits right made at him”. She throws a stick of stove wood at the gander that causes him to run to his puddle of water. The ducks go on and all of the geese get in the water. “Look at my geese, they is the prettiest scenery I got. I likes they eyes, so blue. Sanders likes dat big drake kaise he got such a green neck. Sanders 'low dat all dat green make him look like a parr't.”

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"If I'd let dat nigger he would fetch one of dem parr'ts here, but I don't need narry a bird to talk. When its talkin' to do 'round here I'll do it myself." She claps her hands 7 and laughs, "My pipe is gwine good now. Had to beat it like I wuz beatin' a pap tho' afo' it got to gwine good. See my washin'. Rain driv' me to be late wid my washin' dis week".

"Jesus, have Mercy, if there aint 'Big Baby' hangin' her clothes out. Dat supper fer de Busted Chapel mus' not be gwine so hot. Rev. Smith wuz preachin' gwine into five years at Sain Paul's on Wallace Street, over dar by de ice factory. See dat steeple? Well, dat's it. Rev. Smith wuz a fine lookin' black man wid a long twisted moustache. He also had a fine wife and no chilluns. He could allus git the mourners bench so full dat it would creak. His conflagration (congregation) never paid him much. So when he got a call to Spartanburg he 'cided to go at once and told his people. Dey never wanted him to leave Union, so he 'cided dat de Lord meant for him to stay here."

"'Bout a year had done went by when fer some reason it got to gwine dat Rev. Smith wuz too 'Sporty'. His wife never believed it and she wuz fixin' to have her fust baby. But one of Rev. Smith's deacons wuz dat jealous of him, dat he called a deacon's meetin' and dey 'cided dat dey won't gwine to pay Rev. Smith no mo' money. As Rev. Smith won't dar he never got no wind. So he preached on in de name of de Lawd fer another year wid'out pay. Well you knows how things leaks out. So Spartanburg heerd about it and dey calls Rev. Smith agin. By did time his baby boy is crawlin' and hollerin' fer his cooter bones, and his Pa has done found out dat de Devil is settin' on his pews at Saint Paul's, so he 'cepts de Spartanburg call.

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"He preaches his farwell sermon and tells de righteous dat dar is mansions in de sky for dem, and to dem other niggers has 'bused his name, he points out to dem dat dey shall be burnt in de brimstone and fire thirteen times. Yet dat don't git him no money. So when he goes to Spartanburg he sues Saint Paul's Chapel. Dem lawyers gits a judgement against Saint Paul. Dat been eight years past. Dem niggers aint spent no money on Saint Paul's

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since. Dey still 'tends church, but dey is lettin' it fall mi. ni. down. Dey tells dem lawyers dey is busted and brings dem to see dey church in need of repairs. So ever since then the Methodists cal's Saint Paul de 'Busted Chapel'. Dat make em mad thos ' , and dat why 'Big Baby' twist herself 'round so and say what she did.

“Zion Methodist asked Rev. Smith to come down here three weeks back and preach dey night sermon to dem. He come and fetched his wife and boy. All three of dem wuz dressed up and he had a new car. Zion never helt de niggers that turned out to hear Rev. Smith. He 'lowed in his sermon dat de Lawd gwine to help dem lawyers push dat judgment through, and he wuz gwine to git his money. Ev'ybody grunted a low 'Amen' when he said dat. He is a fine preacher and his church up in Spartanburg is proud of him.

“The 'Busted Chapel' members has give two hot suppers since Rev. Smith preached at Zion. This'n tonight is the second. They has good things to eat, and of course, they makes money, as ev'ything fer the supper is give free.

“Robert Moment is de younges' deacon. He wuz workin' at Mr. Lewis Perrin's drug store and he got one the chain gang for stealin' outen dat white man's drug store. Last week he come home from de gang and now he's gwine 'round wid a'scription list tryin' to git money for Rev. Smith's salary dat las year he preached.

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“Janie is beaten' 'em all. She got a list, and she cook for Miss Gaffney. So Miss Gaffney give her a dollar and a lot of rations for dat fust supper. Janie went 'round to all dem rich white folks houses around Miss Gaffney's and Mr. Bolton's, gittin' money and dey give her a big 'scription. So maybe Rev. Smith won't git to put dem deacons in de 'Busted Chapel' in jail atter all. As fer me, I is gwine to de supper tonight, but ev'y day I sings praises, for dat's my life, Lawd!

“I aint never made no money 'cept when I cooked fer Miz' Bobo three years. She give me \$2.50 a week. I got little things I needed wid it, and paid my 'surance(insurance). I nursed

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Miss Anne Bolton when she wuz a year old and her Pa give me a house and paid me \$3. a week. Miz' Bolton give me all my clothes. Then I went to Miss Josephine Jennings' and lived in her back yard for fifteen years. Mango worked de garden and dey give us our victuals and \$10 a month. All us got is 'surance. He got some and I got some.

“Once Miss Josephine took me to Toledo, Ohio, wid her. We stayed wid her friends dar a month. One day her friend got me to wash and iron fer her and she give me three dollars. I bought me a Sunday dress wid it. Dat night it wuz so hot Miss Josephine's chilluns could not sleep, so de lady took us on de trolley to a park fo' miles away. We stayed dar 'til attar midnight. Miss Joesphine come home in two days. When Miss Josephine and her husband, Mr. Harry Jennings went to Georgia, Mr. Harry took the money me and 'Luck' had and bought us dis house. It cost \$700 and Mr. Harry told us not to let nobody sign our names to no papers, kaise if we did dey would git our house. 'Luck' goes up to de courthouse and Mr. Bedenbaugh axes him a few questions and 'Luck' gives him money fer taxes. It is in my name, Emma Sanders, but 'Luck' got hissself our furniture and dat ole mule. He got our furniture and mule down fer \$20.

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'Luck' give his real name, Mango Sanders. Dey gives Mango receipts.

“I don't never git no money no mo'. Sanders works white folks' gardens and plows dey land wid dat ole mule. He fetches me a little money when he has any. I saves some in de box for de 'surance man and dem taxes. Den us gives some to our church and it aint narry cent left.

“Chile, dar comes my little bantam hen wid seven baby bantams. Let me git her, I never meant for her to git out'n dat dry place. I had her under de house. Lawd, have mercy Jesus, but I has a time. When dem bantams gits bigger I'll give you a pair.” She sings,

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“Carry me to de Promis Land, Lawd, Carry me to de clouds whar de angels will grab me up”. Then she claps her hands and exclaims, “Dats my life, Lawd, Singin' Praises”.